

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

104th Congress
1st Session

Vote No. 276

June 21, 1995, 7:49 p.m.
Page S-8787 Temp. Record

NATIONAL HIGHWAY SYSTEM/Intercity Rail (Amtrak)

SUBJECT: National Highway System Designation Act of 1995 . . . S. 440. Warner motion to table the Roth amendment No. 1444.

ACTION: MOTION TO TABLE FAILED, 36-64

SYNOPSIS: As reported, S. 440, the National Highway System Designation Act of 1995, will designate the National Highway System in accordance with the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). Failure to enact the bill by September 30, 1995, will result in all States losing their National Highway System and Interstate Maintenance funding.

The Roth amendment would permit States to enter into interstate compacts to retain or improve intercity passenger rail service (Amtrak), including high speed rail service. Those compacts could include agreements to maintain existing services, to make capital purchases, and to assemble rights-of-way. States could use a portion of their Federal highway funding as a means of financing such compacts. More specifically, these intercity rail projects would be added to the lists of projects for which States can currently transfer a portion of their Surface Transportation Program funding and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funding to finance.

Debate was limited by unanimous consent. Following debate, Senator Warner moved to table the Roth amendment. Generally, those favoring the motion to table opposed the amendment; those opposing the motion to table favored the amendment.

NOTE: Following the failure of the motion to table, the Roth amendment was adopted by voice vote.

Those favoring the motion to table contended:

We oppose giving States the option of diverting highway funds to Amtrak. We support Amtrak, but we do not think it is as great a priority. The Federal Highway Administration estimates that unmet highway needs in America total \$212 billion and unmet bridge needs total \$78 billion. The annual authorization for the National Highway System is only \$6.5 billion. The highways and bridges of the National Highway System that receive this funding carry over 80 percent of all passenger intercity traffic and over 75 percent of all commercial intercity traffic. In contrast, Amtrak carries only .3 percent of all passenger intercity traffic and it carries 0 percent

(See other side)

YEAS (36)			NAYS (64)			NOT VOTING (0)	
Republicans (31 or 57%)		Democrats (5 or 11%)	Republicans (23 or 43%)		Democrats (41 or 89%)	Republicans (0)	Democrats (0)
Ashcroft	Hutchison	Baucus	Abraham	Akaka	Kennedy		
Bond	Inhofe	Bingaman	Bennett	Biden	Kerrey		
Brown	Kassebaum	Bryan	Burns	Boxer	Kerry		
Coats	Kempthorne	Conrad	Campbell	Bradley	Kohl		
Cochran	Kyl	Glenn	Chafee	Breaux	Lautenberg		
Coverdell	Lugar		Cohen	Bumpers	Leahy		
Craig	McConnell		D'Amato	Byrd	Levin		
Dole	Nickles		DeWine	Daschle	Lieberman		
Domenici	Packwood		Gorton	Dodd	Mikulski		
Faircloth	Shelby		Gramm	Dorgan	Moseley-Braun		
Frist	Simpson		Hatch	Exon	Moynihan		
Grams	Smith		Hatfield	Feingold	Murray		
Grassley	Thomas		Jeffords	Feinstein	Nunn		
Gregg	Thompson		Lott	Ford	Pell		
Helms	Thurmond		Mack	Graham	Pryor		
	Warner		McCain	Harkin	Reid		
			Murkowski	Heflin	Robb		
			Pressler	Hollings	Rockefeller		
			Roth	Inouye	Sarbanes		
			Santorum	Johnston	Simon		
			Snowe		Wellstone		
			Specter				
			Stevens				

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

- 1—Official Business
- 2—Necessarily Absent
- 3—Illness
- 4—Other

SYMBOLS:

- AY—Announced Yea
- AN—Announced Nay
- PY—Paired Yea
- PN—Paired Nay

of all freight traffic. Clearly, it is more imperative that we provide funding for roads and bridges, which are severely underfunded and which carry most of the intercity traffic, than it is that we fund Amtrak, which carries only a very small percentage of the traffic.

At the same time, we are very sympathetic to our colleagues' desire to increase funding for Amtrak. Amtrak is also severely underfunded, and its services are vital, particularly along some very congested Northeast corridors. Rather than robbing Peter to pay Paul, though, we have a proposal that will provide funding for Amtrak without taking any money away from the highway and bridge funding. Specifically, in 1996, .5 cents of the Federal gasoline tax is to be dedicated to the mass transit fund. That fund is already \$5 billion in surplus--it does not need the money. Therefore, our proposal is instead to dedicate that .5 cents to Amtrak. We hope our colleagues reject the Roth amendment in favor of this more sensible alternative.

Those opposing the motion to table contended:

The Roth amendment would allow States to use a portion of their Federal surface transportation funding and air quality improvement funding for Amtrak expenditures. The amendment would not require States to use their funding in this manner, nor would it in any way alter the current transportation funding formulas. All the amendment would do is give the States a new option. States are perfectly capable of determining whether diverting funds to Amtrak makes sense for them, given their own unique transportation needs. Under current law, they are already allowed to divert funds for such purposes as constructing bike paths and pedestrian paths. Frankly, we think most States view rail transportation as a more attractive means of meeting their interstate transportation and air quality improvement needs than walking.

Our colleagues who have argued against Amtrak funding have noted that it currently carries only a small portion of intercity passenger traffic. However, they are underestimating the value of that traffic, and they have failed to recognize that increasing that traffic in many areas is the most cost-effective option that exists for handling increasing traffic volumes. The General Accounting Office estimates that gridlock on the roadways costs our Nation \$100 billion per year in lost productivity. The Department of Transportation put the loss for our 39 largest cities alone at \$44 billion annually. At airports, the annual losses due to winglock (air travel) delays is now roughly \$5 billion and is expected to get much worse over the next several years. Our roadways and airways, in other words, are already filled to capacity and then some. In the Northeast, the problem is especially severe. Traffic volumes are rising, and the costs of new highway construction are rising even faster. For instance, the current plan to improve the major highway artery through Boston is now estimated to cost \$8 billion, even though the total distance that will be covered stretches a tiny 3.5 miles. Amtrak service along the Northeast corridor is especially critical. It currently carries one-half of the combined air-rail market between New York and Washington, D.C. If this service were to end, it would aid the equivalent of 10,000 fully booked DC-9 flights to the already congested air traffic. Our highways and airways cannot absorb the traffic volumes that are currently carried on passenger trains.

However, as all Senators are aware, Amtrak regularly operates at a loss. It has been undergoing several streamlining efforts to reduce costs, but it will still need subsidies, especially for capital purchases. Senators who are upset that it is not self-supporting should be aware that on a per-passenger basis the United States provides far more generous subsidies for highway and airway transportation. Though most of the industrialized world spends heavily on passenger rail systems (European countries spend between 1 percent and 1.5 percent of their Gross Domestic Product), the United States spends a pittance (about .05 percent). Europeans move comfortably in trains that speed along at 200 miles per hour to 300 miles per hour; Americans sit in gridlock.

We are not saying that in all cases it will make sense to increase Amtrak funding. If it is more economical to spend money on highways or bridge repairs, then States will be free to do so. However, if States find that it makes more sense to subsidize rail service, then they should also be able to do so. The Roth amendment would give States this option, so we are pleased to vote in its favor.